Learning and Teaching in the Swanston Academic Building
Cathy Hall
Academic Development Group, College of Business

14 February 2013

Strategic objectives addressed:
This project contributed to the vision symbolised in the new Swanston Academic Building (SAB) of a city-based, globally orientated and professionally engaged College of Business, by integrating strategic objectives and plans from:

a. Transforming the Future RMIT Strategic Plan 2015
   Goal 3 – Connected: In Priority 3 (p. 11)
   ‘Support academics and teaching staff to deliver excellent education and research’. This priority will be reflected through the “…provision of support to academic and teaching staff to use new knowledge, educational techniques and technologies effectively…” (p. 12)

b. College of Business – 2011 Plan
   Main Priority 3 – Transformative in Impact (p. 3)
   ‘Develop and implement a PD plan in preparation to move to SAB and for the key changes needed to prepare for new learning spaces’ (CP3.2, p. 8)

Strategic Positioning Project – Transitioning to SAB, ‘One College Way’ theme
Project 2: ‘Professional development for enhancing learning & teaching’

   Learning and Teaching (p. 17)
   ‘…need to invest more heavily in the support of our staff to bring the latest in educational pedagogy…’
   ‘…need strong professional development for staff…’

d. LTIF Principal Themes (2012)
   - Using new technologies and learning spaces to enhance student performance
   - Renewing educational practice through professional development

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<th>Internal order number: 360343</th>
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<td>Project leader contact details:</td>
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<td>Email: <a href="mailto:cathy.hall@rmit.edu.au">cathy.hall@rmit.edu.au</a></td>
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<td>Phone: x55551</td>
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<th>Project team members:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Dr Tom Palaskas</td>
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<td>• Carmelo Ortuso</td>
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1 Executive summary
Provide a summary (no more than one A4 page) that describes the project and what was achieved. This will appear on the RMIT website with a link to the final report.

The purpose of the SAB PD Program was to facilitate a smooth transition of academic and teaching staff in the College of Business to the SAB learning spaces in order to maximise the potential of their innovative design. Many of the learning spaces in the SAB extended the learning and teaching possibilities then available to the College of Business. The challenge faced by the ADG team was to provide opportunities for teaching staff to develop understanding and skills so that they and their students gained maximum benefit from the use of these settings.

A review of the literature on new learning spaces indicated that the SAB project was unique in a number of ways. Firstly, the scale of the transition was unprecedented, involving an entire college with hundreds of academics and teaching staff representing numerous discipline areas. Secondly, the number, physical configuration, and technology inclusions of the learning spaces was so varied that the potential existed for a wide range of effective pedagogical approaches. Mapping this diversity of potential teaching practice with the variety of prospective PD participants and stakeholders resulted in a project with unusual complexity in its planning and execution.

To meet this challenge, the ADG team designed the PD program with a timely, flexible and adaptive approach. The SAB Professional Development Reference Group played an important role in ensuring that the emerging program design anticipated or at least kept pace with identified staff needs and perceptions. The program was designed to deliver the necessary knowledge and skills before the move to SAB, originally scheduled for Semester 1 in 2013, but later brought forward to Semester 2, 2012.

- Timeliness was important because knowledge transfer had to occur systematically, well before staff moved to the new building. Long (2009) considers that the timing of professional development is a key factor in transitioning staff to enhanced learning spaces. He states, “What absolutely cannot happen regarding professional development for these spaces is to wait until they are built”. At the same time it was important to recognise that “Just in Time” and “Just for Me” development activities are usually the most effective.

- Flexibility in the types of PD provided was necessary. Pedagogical affordances provided by the spaces can be applied to a variety of learning and teaching scenarios. So the program needed to include and advocate for a range of potential pedagogies.

- Multiple approaches were required to meet the learning needs and preferences of academics and teaching staff. (Diaz et al. 2009; Pedder, Storey & Opfer 2008; Long 2009).

The program was designed and implemented in a carefully paced series of interventions, with resources and publications released at regular intervals. The frequency of interventions increased from the monthly sessions which commenced early in early semester 1, 2012 to the daily “walk-through” sessions in the week prior to occupation in July 2012.
2 Outcomes

2.1.1 Provide a brief overview of the project’s outcomes and impact.

New generation learning spaces are arenas for innovative teaching practices that may be unfamiliar to those who have taught in more traditional classrooms in which students occupy a physically subordinate space, where a teachers’ station separates the ‘conveyor’ and the ‘receivers’ of knowledge.

This project supported the design and implementation of professional development for academic and teaching staff from the College of Business in semester 1, 2012. The purpose was to facilitate a smooth transition of academic and teaching staff to the SAB’s new generation learning spaces in order to maximise the potential of their innovative design. Activity and feedback received to date indicate the achievement of the initial project purpose.

Two evaluative booklets have been produced during the course of the project. The first is a targeted literature review focussed on teaching practice in new generation learning spaces, and the second describes the activities undertaken during the project.

2.1.2 Include any scholarly output in the form of conference presentations or journal papers.

- Contribution of an abstract for a book chapter
- Conference paper - Transition by Design - submitted to HERDSA 2013
Project outcomes and impacts

2.1.3 List and discuss the outcomes the project was designed to achieve and the outcomes the project has achieved, including any literature review and evidence of the impact the project has had on students.

Palmer and Dunford’s interpretation of Weick’s sense-making model of organisational change (p. 247) provides a useful perspective of the organisation at this stage of its transition as: “being in an ongoing state of accomplishment and re-accomplishment” which “assists individuals in developing their capabilities for managing the ambiguity of organisational change”.

The affordances of the SAB’s new learning spaces facilitate the collaborative learning ethos that underpins the university’s student-centred learning model. As individual staff and different groups of students use the new spaces, they need to identify with, adapt and develop the learning environment to meet their own needs, both discipline-based and cohort-based. This requires them to re-imagine their own teaching practice. The degree to which this objective was met is evidenced in the early survey responses about changes to established teaching practice. The responses indicate that exposure to the professional development program has often had the desired effect:

“ADG did a good job of getting ready people who wanted to get ready.”

“I continue to make changes to my delivery week by week, from traditional lecture to a hybrid”

“More group work.”

“Much more group based discussion…increased diversity of conversation.”

“Less one to group lecturing and more class interaction.”

“Considering the environment in a lecture theatre, I’ve included more interactive/group tasks.”

“Have given more practical work to do in class so that I can move around the class to aid.”

“Given the distribution of the class is now across tables, and in ‘pods’ I have had to create more time and activities to encourage group work.”

“Increased use of group based activities.”

“The design of the rooms with grouped tables makes group interactions and group work more practical, I have started to take advantage of this in my seminars.”

“The non-linear layout enables me to see more of what my students are working on and allows them to sit in groups and help each other.”

“The space enhanced, rather than inhibited my teaching style...”

“Much better interaction with students.”

“It’s easier to have conversations with students than a traditional tutorial space.”

The transition from the old to new and innovative environments, toward what Barrett and Zhang (2009, p.iv) describe as a ‘finished beginning’ commenced when the SAB was occupied and teaching commenced. The ‘finished beginning’ represented the second phase of the change process, which requires more targeted development, designed for and applied to the reality of faculty’ pedagogical activity.

While most of the operational, technical and administrative concerns related to the NGLS’s have been satisfactorily addressed, there is a need to build a clearer picture of the transition in teaching practice and the SAB’s role in fostering and sustaining such change. As the College moves into its second semester in the SAB, professional development and the associated evaluation will continue.
2.1.4 Describe briefly any issues that may have prevented you achieving all the original outcomes stated in the application.
The bringing forward by six months of the move resulted in a significant acceleration of PD activities.

2.1.5 Describe any disciplinary and interdisciplinary linkages that have emerged as a result of the project.
Participation in discussions about a proposed book proposal with contributions from staff in SEH, DSC and Business

Dissemination strategies and outputs
Describe the ways in which the project’s outcomes have been or will be shared across the university, the sector and/or nationally and internationally. For guidance refer to the ALTC Dissemination Framework http://www.olt.gov.au/grants-and-projects/dissemination

a. Reports
Literature Review: The impact of new learning spaces on teaching practice
Transition by Design: The Swanston Academic Building Professional Development Project 2012

b. Web resources

c. Conference presentations

Conference paper - Transition by Design - submitted to HERDSA 2013

d. Dissemination events

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<th>Event Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>12 Meetings of SAB Professional Development Learning &amp; Teaching Reference Group</td>
<td>12 school representatives and guests</td>
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<td>Launch of PD program and Building 108 Practice Space by PVC and Dean (L&amp;T)</td>
<td>45</td>
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<tr>
<td>12 lunchtime “Open” professional development sessions covering various aspects of collaborative learning</td>
<td>154</td>
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<td>6 School sessions, identifying and discussing various room types, to support room choices prior to timetabling. Concerns associated with specific discipline requirements were addressed. Some schools requested repeat sessions.</td>
<td>117</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 vendor-delivered professional development and ‘train the trainer’ sessions</td>
<td>60</td>
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associated with Tidebreak collaborative software “Teamspot” and “Class Spot”

| 6 Drop in sessions to practice space, for advice on technology and teaching practice | 42 |
| 17 L&T Walk-through sessions – ‘week 0’. | 239 |

Resources - distributed to schools, available on SAB-Blog and now at http://www.rmit.edu.au/bus/adg/teachingspaces:

- Reference list of relevant articles about New Generation Learning Spaces.
- 4 brochures distributed to all academic and teaching staff
- Bookmarks identifying the members of the SAB PD Reference Group
- 10 posters of room plans distributed to all schools.
- 8 x 2 page “Quick Guides”, plans of the various new learning space types with affordances, distributed to all staff
- Emailed invitations from DPVC(L&T) for the PD Open lunchtime sessions
- Video recordings of six lunchtime seminars
- Video clips from other universities about aspects of new learning spaces
- Literature Review
3 Evaluation of project outcomes

List evaluation outcomes including evidence of the impact of the project and the value it will bring to the university and/or the sector. For guidance refer to the ALTC Evaluation Framework [http://www.olt.gov.au/evaluation](http://www.olt.gov.au/evaluation)

Pettigrew observed that “Judgements about success are likely to be conditional on who is doing the assessment and when the judgements are made” (Pettigrew et al (2001), cited in Palmer and Dunford, 2002, p 249). The ongoing evaluation of the transition process will consider multiple perspectives, spanning the underpinning university vision, the architects’ intent, the types of teaching and learning experiences traditionally used, the extent of student engagement, and the functionality of the new spaces, as well as the complexities, opportunities and constraints associated with various academic disciplines, class sizes and faculty profiles.

a. What processes were planned and what were put in place for the project?

Communication strategies targeted the individual needs of different audiences while acknowledging the specific and unique organisational culture they are sited within, and influenced by. Associated communication activities, tools and artefacts were designed and delivered as a single integrated process with inbuilt interdependence and flexibility. The communication plan acknowledged the cultures, relationships and interactions in order to address the needs of the entire College.

b. Were there any variations from the processes that were initially proposed, and if so, why?

The bringing forward of the move to the SAB by six months required a significant acceleration of professional development activity. The personalised approach that was initially planned was not feasible in the shorter time frame.

c. How might the project be improved?

Greater staff engagement was noted in schools where the leadership team actively supported professional development activity. More opportunities for practice and curriculum redesign would have been provided if sufficient time had been available.

d. What were the observable short-term outcomes?

The highly visible program and resources ensured that at the very least there were few ‘surprises’ confronting staff when classes commenced on July 16, 2012. A survey was distributed in week 4, which found no significant problems in terms of staff understanding of the affordances and potential of the learning spaces. It was apparent that the placement of whiteboards was an issue for some staff in some rooms. Project team members conducted an audit and a request for whiteboards was submitted. They are due to be installed in late February 2013.

e. What factors helped and hindered in the achievement of the outcomes?

The project initiatives and their attendant pressures created a significant workload for the project team and other members of the College of Business Academic Development Group. The team spirit and camaraderie that developed through the life of the project ensured that deadlines were met and project outputs were of a consistently high quality.

f. What measures, if any, have been put in place to promote sustainability of the project’s focus and outcomes?

All resources developed for the project are available on the ADG website: [http://www.rmit.edu.au/bus/adg/teachingspaces](http://www.rmit.edu.au/bus/adg/teachingspaces). The 2013 professional development program follows on from the 2012 experience, emphasising the course experience “good teaching questions” in the context of NGLS. More detailed analysis over the course of 2013 will allow the program’s impact to be more readily understood.
Appendix A

Include any material that may support your claims of outcomes and impact.


Attach pictures, presentation material, web links and so on that may be important. In particular, please provide an image that can be used for publications, such as a poster.

literature_review.pdf Transition_by_Design.pdf posterV1.pdf